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## Two Models of Universalism: Contrasting Findings

► *Abstract: This final chapter recapitulates the key differences and similarities between French and US approaches to foreign policy as reflected in the interviews and documents, and it addresses how these differing models of universalism affect cooperation between both countries as well as the interplay within international organizations. It examines in particular the issue of ideology (including religion) and realism in foreign policy, including the contrasting views between French and US political leaders in addressing the globalization process; the free market; the interconnection among private corporations, national interests, and foreign policy; and the role of the states in a multipolar world.*

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This final chapter recapitulates the key differences and similarities and addresses how these different models of universalism affect cooperation between France and the United States and the interplay within international organizations. It examines in particular the issue of ideology and realism in foreign policy, including approaches to: globalization and free markets; the interconnection between private corporations, national interests, and foreign policy; and the role of the states in a multipolar world. The chapter concludes with the challenges that both countries will face in the twenty-first century.

France and the United States have both evolved from revolutions, although in the United States it was originally a war of independence, but the organization of the society subsequently created showed the US insurrection to be an actual revolution as dramatic as that of France. The system these two countries created influenced many changes around the world, and both have claimed to bring liberty and equality to the forefront of world affairs. In both countries, political elites have a vision of their country that includes exceptional history and development, and that the historical experience of their country in significant aspects could be applied to many parts of the world. There is also a predominant view (which implies a considerable degree of ethnocentrism) that the values they defend would be accepted universally. In both countries, political elites and a majority of the population believe in the superiority of a political system that allows individual freedom, and both believe in the superiority of democracy over any other system of government. France and the United States share the idea of progress, as well as some aspects of individualism in the sense of recognizing individual capabilities and individual accomplishment. However, the interpretation of these concepts and the stance on how to promote these views make a major difference in the way each country acts in the world.

These are two concepts of the universal that in certain aspects coincide and in certain other aspects are in opposition to each other. As we have seen in previous chapters, there are differences in the perspectives on foreign policy.

Another important aspect of French and US interactions is the issue, often put forward by many politicians in the United States and reflected in blogs and in the media, of French anti-Americanism. This belief developed and became relatively widespread with the establishment of the Fifth Republic in France and with de Gaulle's actions regarding NATO and the expelling of the US military from France, as seen in the

previous chapter, but recently it was revived with considerable intensity after the confrontations over the US invasion of Iraq:

Our relations with France are tainted with the traditional French anti-Americanism. French people cannot help it, but they do not like Americans. (R–Senator, senior adviser)

My interviews demonstrate that contrary to these widespread claims, the large majority of the French political elite does not dislike Americans, even if many certainly disagree with US policies, but disagreement with the US government does not translate into dislike of the US population. As François Mitterrand once said: “J’aime les Américains, pas leur politique” [I like Americans, but not their politics] (Mitterrand and Claisse 1980, 242). This view was also repeated by all French interviewees. The following quote from a former French foreign affairs official illustrates the key thinking of the French political elites interviewed about the issue of French anti-Americanism:

There is very little anti-Americanism per se among the main political parties in France, even within the Communist Party. What we have is a strong opposition to many US foreign policies. And I believe there is even less negativity among the French population in general. For example, I was present last year in Normandy during the three days of the celebration of the Allied Forces landing. I was amazed by the expression of friendship and love that the Normans expressed to the 100 people who came to celebrate the landing, as they do every year. (PS–former government official)

What predominates in the relations between these countries is a different way of looking at the world, which is reflected in specific situations, such as the Iraq War, for example. Moreover, the United States tries to impose its view, and France tries to stay independent in its actions in the world. For instance, regarding the Middle East, France has many friends and special ties with the countries in the Middle East, and French ties include the Arab world as well as Israel.

The main difference resides in the role that the armed forces should play. In the United States, almost any foreign military intervention gets the support of the majority of the population. The government is able to justify it. As the following statements imply, there is a limit to what France can do in the international arena.

In the following sections I outline what elements in each society contribute to the diverging views on foreign affairs. Particular emphasis is placed on the perceptions of the role of the state and its relation with

global economics and international cooperation; in addition, I analyze the role of religion and social structure in each society and how ideology affects international agreements.

## **Concept and role of the state and nation**

The concept of the nation, of the republic, is mostly based on citizenship and secular society in France, while in the United States the idea of the nation is more connected to a lifestyle, promoting a more individualistic society; in the case of the United States, the state as representative of the society plays a minor role. In general, there is more widespread support for the state in France. In France, the concept of the nation is also very much equivalent to the state. The nation-state implies in France the alliance of an organization, which represents the French nation. The French belong to the French nation or French state; in the minds of the people there is not really a clear distinction, as these two concepts are interchangeable. The attachment to the French state includes the sense of belonging to the French nation. In contrast the US nation was created with people from different national backgrounds and as result of a war of independence against the British crown. After the American Revolution, the new nation became their territory, yet it encompassed a variety of states with different experiences and no clearly centralized national government. While, in France, the territory was very much defined, before the French Revolution and what happened after the revolution against the monarchy was a form of national integration by limiting local languages and an adherence to a more highly centralized organization beyond the local; the national French state. In the United States there are several nations, such as the Native American peoples who coexist within the US national borders, and even immigrants can claim to belong to two nations, as evidenced by the practice of hyphenation for purposes of classification and identification.

People in the United States have often been characterized as distrusting the central government, and many would relate this distrust to the founding of the country:

Our founding fathers wanted to prevent the state from intervening in every aspect of social life, like it happens in many countries of Europe. They wanted the state to protect free speech and discussion of ideas and leave the individuals to develop businesses and other activities free from government



interference. Americans at the time believed that a good society would develop with the help of God and the good will of people. (D–Rep.)

In the same tone, Shmuel Eisenstad (2005) suggested that mistrust toward a strong state has become a firm component of the American political tradition and that no concept of the state has ever developed beyond this general mistrust. The French–US differences regarding the concept of the state are also present in relation to the economy. There is more of a coordinated market economy in France than in the United States, where there is a strong emphasis on the unrestricted primacy of the market. All French interviewees from the right and left of the political spectrum agree on the need for the state to play a major role in the economy, and those from the left—especially from the Communist Party but also a considerable minority from the Socialist Party—would support state ownership in some key sectors, such as energy, transport, and even banking:

The 2008 crisis has shown us the limits of the neoliberal agenda promoted by the United States. We should go back to the policies that made us rich after World War II. That is a mixed economy, with strong regulations by the state and some key sectors controlled directly by the state. (PC–MP)

There is also in France, as we have seen, an attempt to find equilibrium between the individual and the collectivity. As the interviews of French leaders show, in establishing regulations the government in France is seen as an active partner with the representatives of industry, business, and even unions. Also, in contrast to political elites in the United States, those in France see a wider role for the state to address social issues. That is why in France the orientation towards justice and helping the poor is based on the government's distribution of resources structurally. The state is viewed as a mediator between different groups in society.

The state is an organization that is expected to ensure the cohesion of society; it is a necessary structure to protect citizens and to guarantee freedom. By eliminating the monarchy, the French leaders of the time took control of the government and made it the guarantor of freedom. The state then developed into what it is today, and particularly important for the imaginary of the French population has been the predominant role played by the state in the organization of the economy after World War II and the great period of economic prosperity, called in France the “*Trente Glorieuses*,” which refers to the 30 years of continuous economic growth from 1945 to 1975. Following this dirigiste approach, by which the

state exerted a strong influence on the direction of the economy (including investments and ownership of certain service sectors and energy), the French very rapidly reached one of the highest standards of living in the world. Therefore, people expect that the state today will serve as a defense against economic adversity and that it will create the safety net to provide its citizens with the minimum to survive and stimulate the creation of jobs.

In the United States, the state is not seen exactly as a structure that serves as a safety net or as an institution to spread wealth; rather, it is conceived as the key organization to defend US citizens against aggression from foreign enemies, to protect citizens from harm, and ultimately to ensure that everyone follows the laws. Furthermore, in the United States, capitalism and the free market are perceived as universal truths and there is little tolerance among interviewees from both parties for increasing the role of the state in the economy, and certainly not for ownership of companies (with the exception of some temporary crisis, like the one in 2008, in which the US government became *de facto* stockholders of car companies). The predominant approach in the United States is that the state is a facilitator, but not the key actor in helping the poor and obtaining justice. These could be obtained by individual and private organizations' voluntary actions (mostly religious organizations) and through charity and individual giving. In short, in the United States the prevalent concept is that the welfare system that the state provides should be complemented through the action of individuals and civil society. However, I want to emphasize that predominance does not imply unanimity on each side of the Atlantic; while there are by far more fundamentalist free-market ideologues among the American than among the French interviewees, the reality is a little subtler. Indeed, although the US political leaders do not question the basics of capitalism and free-market economics, there are some people who disagree with an extreme free market in which there are almost no regulations. Three interviewees from the Democratic Party were dismayed by the decrease in regulations of the US economy, especially from the 1980s to the present, which they saw as contributing to the creation of the 2008 financial crisis, as the following quote from a D-Senator, senior advisor, illustrates:

One thing is the state direct intervention in the economy, which I do not support, and another the erosion of most regulations as it has been happening in the US for more than three decades now. Frankly, I agree with some

economists, who argue that the deregulation of the financial system was the cause of the recent financial crisis.

Regarding the present trend of worldwide liberalization of the economy, several French interviewees argued that even though there was considerable resistance to the liberalization of the economy, “market forces have compelled France to follow a more liberal economy, including under the government of the left” (PS–Senator). To be sure under the leadership of the United States, through concrete international policies and the weight of its economy, most countries of the world, especially since the 1980s, had to adopt more liberal policies:

Multinationals, many of whom were US-based at the beginning of this neoliberal revolution, have certainly influenced this tendency by offering jobs and a considerable contribution to domestic production, and domestic companies also pressured their governments to adapt their regulations to the new realities of the world economy in order for them to be able to compete, which resulted in relaxing labor laws and keeping wages at an acceptable level for the companies. (PS–former French foreign minister)

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the United States has been exerting a major influence in orienting the direction of the economy in the Western world and, arguably, since the 1980s to the present all over the world. Indeed, the United States has played a key role in neoliberalization across the globe. For example, it has induced the measures taken by Latin American countries in the 1990s and by East Asian countries in the 1997–98 crisis, as Leo Panitch and Sam Ginding (2004) document. This influence is due to different processes that started at the beginning of the twentieth century, but it has been particularly strong since World War II. These factors include the establishment of several economic institutions under the leadership of the United States, the obvious size and importance of the US economy, and the fact that the US government has worked in concert with the interests of many large US companies around the world. This was not recognized or even mentioned by the US interviewees. They consider the success of the US companies and the influence acquired by the US government are more a result of inherent characteristics and hard work of the US people than any other factors:

In international issues Americans try to think ahead on the ways of doing things, of making things happen. This has been driven by a strong reliance on the market economy and on American entrepreneurship. Since the creation of our country we have always relied on individual initiatives in

the economy. We did not wait for the government to help us. That is what we want to project and to promote in other countries. Other nations have different kinds of incentives but also have different philosophies on how to organize emerging societies. (R-Senator)

I will say that the globalization of the economy that we are experiencing now is a scenario outside of the specific human rights, for example, or the rule of law, or freedom of religion. It comes down to economic freedom. That is, the way in which we will make a living and sustain our culture and advance new ideas. (D-Rep.)

These quotes reflect that US political leaders, with a few exceptions, prioritize what they call economic freedom and have embraced, and in fact promoted, the globalization of free-market economics. Among the French political elite, although a majority also supports economic freedom and market economics, there is also concern with preserving a welfare system, a security net:

We are in a world where the free market predominates and the large corporations wield enormous power, and we have to face that reality. Still, even within that context we need to fight to keep what we have accomplished. The greatness of France is to a large part the creation of an original social model, which must be preserved. (PS-Former foreign affairs official)

Similar to other Western European states, the French state has tried to insert itself within the international economy in a much more nuanced manner than in the case of the United States, where there is much more genuine support among the political elite on the major question of market economy versus regulated economy. Furthermore, in terms of economic influence in the world in the twenty-first century, the French model certainly has a very limited impact, as this French senator (UMP) states:

An important factor to consider is the proportions of the economy; while France is now a relatively average economy in the world in terms of its size, the United States is the largest economy as a country (not considering the EU as a whole). Furthermore, the US, due to its land resources, minerals, and energy, is very rich. Only a united European Union could instigate a different economic model to the world, but its member countries are far from being in agreement on this aspect.

Indeed, even though the European Central Bank has played a fundamental role in the internationalization of the member states of the Eurozone in particular, and of many other non-member countries indirectly, the European Union is not yet acting as a single economic unit.

This difference between the United States and France reflects a more complicated picture than often described when speaking about the capitalist Western world. As Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin (2004, 7) argue, it is a fallacy rather widespread “to treat all the advanced capitalist states as equal units of analysis.” Undeniably, even though the capitalist system dominates the world today, not every capitalist country works the same. There are institutional arrangements and social formations specific to France and to other countries of Europe which preclude a complete liberalization of the market. In fact, the experiences of France and other countries of Europe, such as Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands—with their strong welfare systems—constitute some alternative models to the homogenization of capitalism.

The distrust of the central government in the United States, and the rhetoric of limiting the size and actions of the government are often related to the founding fathers, as we have seen in previous quotes; and as Shmuel Eisenstadt (2005) argues, these views have become part of the US political tradition, which has been communicated from generation to generation since the founding of the country. However, in truth this view of the state has not always been so widespread. During the twentieth century, for instance, there have been periods of considerable support for the intervention of the state (during the 1950s and 1960s), and there are many aspects of state intervention that a majority of Americans through the years have supported until today, such as Social Security, Medicare, the military, and agriculture (which includes strong subsidies from the government), as well as what has been characterized as corporate welfare (Bandow 2012; De Haven 2012; Hinkle 2012; Huff 1993). It seems that mainstream US political leaders have a consensual discourse for the world and then in practice have subtler and often opposing views when enacting domestic politics. To be sure, political leaders from both parties accept state intervention in the economy in one or more of the areas mentioned above.

However, even if contradictory, the conceptions of the role of the state affect the way each country relates to other nations around the world, particularly as they concern regulation of the economy versus market liberalization, as well as the expansion of free-market economics more generally. How the different actors see capitalist globalization would certainly affect international relations, as well as economic policies pushed through the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, for example, which influence the organization of the economy in many

countries around the world. The leadership role of the United States in developing a market economy worldwide has been well documented (Dées and Saint Guilhem 2009; Foot et al. 2003; World Financial Watch 2013), but the participation of France is not as clear. For instance, to what extent the French state has played an active role together with domestic capitalist forces in constituting a global free-market economy is unclear, but by participating in European Union decision-making and accepting some of the key precepts of a liberated market economy, which limits considerably the actions of the state, France also contributes by default to the promotion of the marketization of the economy.

The alliance between the US government and US corporations has had strong repercussions internationally and also in the US domestic arena. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the US working class has had a very limited role in influencing the government. The weakness of the US labor movement is reflected in the stagnation of real wages since the 1980s to the present, as Robert Cox (1987) and John Di Nardo and David Lee (2004) argue. Certainly, according to data from the US Census Bureau (2011) the private-sector hour earnings in constant dollars were \$7.91 in 1990 and 8.91 in 2010. An increase of only \$1 in 10 years, while the cost of living increased \$1.80 during the same period. Another considerable difference relates to the number of hours worked; in 2011, the average American worked 34.5 hours per week; in France the average was 26.8 hours per week (Sauter et al. 2012). This average includes full- and part-time workers. The average US worker earned a little more than \$30 per hour in 2011, while the French worker earned \$34.26 per hour (Sauter et al. 2012). Furthermore, US overall working hours increased dramatically in the last quarter of the twentieth century (by about 12 percent), while French workers had a 10 percent decrease in working hours per capita in the same period. However, even if French workers are still comparatively better off, the capitalist system that predominates in the world today has created competition among countries to lower salaries and standards, and that tendency has been directly affecting the French social model and cultural traditions that developed since the revolution.

The pronounced erosion of advantages for US workers and the inability to reduce inequality in the last 40 years in the United States do not seem to be recognized by a majority of the US political elites interviewed. They assume that everyone in the world wants to be like Americans, that everyone wants to live like the stereotypical suburban ideal, which is not even true for a large proportion of Americans. Most interviewees



characterized the United States as the land of opportunity, where people enjoy great social mobility, as the following quote epitomizes:

When talking about our role in the world we need also to point out the attraction we exert as a country. You see everyone in the world would like to come to live in the United States, and this is because we offer opportunities that no other country offers. People working hard could move up in the social ladder very fast. (R–Senator)

Interviewees still refer to a period from the nineteenth century through most of the twentieth century, during which this assertion of the existence of opportunities and social mobility in the United States was certainly true, but empirical evidence shows that at the turn of the twenty-first century there was no more social mobility in the United States than in most advanced capitalist countries (Baldwin 2009; Karabel and Laurison 2011). Additionally, there is more inequality in the United States than in France and most other countries of Europe (Karabel and Laurison 2011). In fact, the United States is the country with the most inequality among the world's postindustrial advanced capitalist countries (World Bank 2013). In sum, the United States has lost one of the key elements of the so called “American Dream”: that is, the possibility to reach higher standards of living, if not within the same generation, at least to pass on these higher standards from one generation to the other. The adaptation to the neoliberal economy and the combination of the absence of strong unions and left-leaning parties, which question the premises of free-market economics, allow US companies to have millions of people working for less. Ideologically, in the United States there is more acceptance of poverty and inequality than in France, and poverty is often explained as a result of people's personal shortcomings. Even people in political leadership positions consider success or failure as a result of personal characteristics:

I always say that opportunities are there. People could either take advantage of these opportunities or not. Despite the global competition, there are still plenty of good paying jobs in America, but they require much effort and hard work to get them. (R–former official)

Culturally, France is not ready for that route, even though the country is under much pressure to adapt to a situation in which workers would work more and make less; moreover, despite an overall low union membership, unions are still strong in certain areas and have the support of several political parties:

There is a question of a cultural choice and the image French people have of themselves and the ideal of promoting equality and fairness around the world. You cannot have a foreign projection and policies that promote equality and fairness and then start lowering expectations in their own society. (PC—official international affairs)

In France, as in most countries of Western Europe, there is a strong push among political elites from the left and center right to confront the problems on two fronts at the same time:

The European economy should remain competitive and at the same time we should abandon our conquests, what Europe has become during the twentieth century, which above all implies the sense of redistribution of wealth and social justice. (PS—MP)

The large majority of French interviewees was in agreement that France should maintain the politics of solidarity and promote that view around the world. The differences between the left and the right are a question of degree in terms of more or less support for social welfare (the UMP tend to support more free-market economics than does the Socialist Party, for example), but among the main political parties very few voices question the ethics of solidarity and the need to continue to provide a welfare system and to redistribute wealth.

The system that predominates in the world today is affecting many people in France as well as in many other countries of Europe. The new economies such as China depend on labor conditions that Europeans cannot accept, such as six-day work weeks, very limited vacations, and very low salaries. Of course no politician will support that path: “Europe cannot go back to the nineteenth century” (PS—Senator). In that context, the main political parties of France, such as the Socialist Party and the UMP, are very much pro-European Union because they see that “only a large economy would be able to face the challenges ahead and be successful at the end” (UMP—MP).

In the United States, the neoliberal system and its consequences are not much questioned by the mainstream parties; therefore this view of strong support for the free market is also reflected in foreign policy. As this R—Senator says:

There is certainly a considerable advocacy in the US on behalf of free-market economics. That means that the markets in which the citizens are involved are included in the formulations of foreign policy and set in terms of supply and demand.



However, at the same time, most political leaders from both parties support the activities of the US government in helping private US companies that have issues with foreign governments. See, for example, US government interventions in support of the United Fruit Company in Central America and ITT in Chile, and US government agencies' spying on behalf of US companies (Campbell 2000; Millar et al. 2001; Schröm 1999). This could appear contradictory with the prevalent idea in the United States of limiting the role of the government in the market, but in fact it follows the logic of a society in which support for business is not just a policy, it is an ideology. In the United States, people want freedom from government, but they are not concerned about freedom from business. For instance, firms can access and use private data with very limited regulatory control. Most businesses, including even those that handle sensitive personal information, such as credit card companies, can easily and legally share information about individuals with other businesses, and the affected customers have to be very proactive to prevent this from happening.

The different approaches to privacy between the United States and France are rooted in deep differences regarding the role of government and private companies. The US political elites tend to approach the issue of privacy from a more *laissez-faire* perspective, leaving it to industry and business to decide on their practices and policies. In short, they allow market forces to freely determine what constitutes an invasion of privacy. In France, privacy is considered a fundamental right, and as with any fundamental right, it is expected that the government will play a role in protecting it. Many European countries share this vision, and the EU has issued the "Data Protection Directive" to prevent misuse of personal data and protect the privacy rights of all EU citizens (Kobrin 2004). These different approaches, based on different cultural mindsets, represent examples of areas of confrontation in international commerce, related to the Internet, travel (Movius and Krup 2009), and many other businesses that deal with personal data.

The concept of freedom in foreign affairs implies, in both France and the United States, a rejection of totalitarianism and dictatorship, and both countries want their firms to be able to operate around the world with as few restrictions as possible. The difference is that in the United States there is less tolerance than in France for regulations established by foreign governments. For France, the regulatory arena is not as much an issue, because in France and Europe in general there are already a considerable number of regulations that companies must follow.

Furthermore, in the United States, as some of the politicians interviewed suggested, there is a tendency to equate freedom of the press with the existence of several media outlets owned by private companies, while in France, due to a history of government-regulated and owned media outlets, there is a tendency to concentrate more on the extent and diversity of the circulation of ideas, independent of who owns the outlet. As a French PS–MP said, “You know, a well-regulated guaranteed free press does not have to be owned by a diversity of private companies.” Therefore, when acting in the world and requesting freedom, these two countries are not always talking about the same thing.

Another element of these countries’ presence in the world concerns the activities of voluntary organizations, such as nongovernmental organizations, churches, and civil organizations. In the United States, these organizations play an important role through charities, helping the poor, working with new immigrants and so on. In France, their role is not as prominent, since the state largely plays those roles. Moreover, the action of churches that proselytize within the larger society is very much accepted as part of a free society in the United States, but is often resented as cultural imperialism in other countries around the world. Also, in France, as in several other countries in Europe, there are restrictions to activities of certain religious groups, which are categorized as dangerous sects.

However, at the present level of market globalization, the states and even the EU encounter serious difficulties controlling much in the way of the flow of exchanges among nations, whether in goods, services, or individuals. Indeed, the capitalist economic organization, based on the relatively unrestricted circulation of goods and persons, tends to supersede any established codes or regulations. The more the exchanges are intensified, the more the flows tend to go beyond any limits or frames. In this context, France and other European countries would like to establish frameworks that would limit the damage that the free market produces, such as inequality, deprivation, pollution, and so on. In contrast, the predominant approach in the United States consists of preventing attempts at regulating market flows, as the interviews suggest. This support among the majority of US leaders for a worldwide free market, including the support for business and the activities of US companies in the world, plays a major role in espousing or opposing international agreements. Indeed, the control of the world economy is increasingly concentrated in a small core of large corporations, a majority of which is US-based (Vitali

et al. 2011). It is well known that the United States refuses to comply with or to ratify international treaties related to environmental protection, such as the Kyoto Protocol, for example. This is directly related to the US political elite's support for business and the actions of US companies in the world, without consideration for the environment or any other negative effects. Indeed, a minority of interviewees, (six republicans, and one democrat), expressed doubts about the role of human action in causing Global warming, while all Europeans interviewed from all political parties, agreed that global warming was induced by humans (even though there was no agreement on what to do). The perspective of the majority of US political leaders interviewed on economics and the free market is complemented by an ideology of what is right and wrong in foreign affairs. The following section will address the role and extent of religious influences on political leaders' thinking about foreign affairs and international relations.

## **Religion and providentialism in foreign affairs**

One of the key arguments advanced by the interviewees regarding US foreign policy was the special place that the United States occupies in world history; accordingly, it must play a leadership role in the world. This missionary view of the role of the country's special qualities and its role in foreign affairs is very much connected to a religious interpretation, in which the United States is seen as closer to God than all the other countries of the world. This is what Rogers Smith (2013) characterizes as providentialism. In this view, the providential United States will provide the ideas and direction that the world needs to achieve peace and prosperity.

The views on politics and religion in the United States are often traced back to the Puritans. Scholars such as John Diggins (1986), Harry Jaffa (1984), Ellis Sandoz (1990), Alexis de Tocqueville (1969), and Gordon Wood (1989) considered the Puritan American founders as providing the formative influence on the US national character, and the founding of the American state to be like a religious act. Robert Bellah (1975), for instance, suggests that the covenant tradition of the Puritans was fundamental for the subsequent development of the moral and religious values and characteristics that traditionally legitimated American society. Therefore, the references to the founding fathers are very much

surrounded with a religious symbolism. As Hodgson (2013) states, “It has its trinity and its disciples: George Washington the father, Abraham Lincoln the martyred son, and Thomas Jefferson the Paraclete, advocate and comforter.”

In fact, the allusion to the founding fathers as connecting religion to politics in the US popular imagination seems displaced and exaggerated, since several of the founding fathers had strong tendencies to Deism and agnosticism and struggled to free the new country from the politics of religion (Hodgson 2003). Thomas Jefferson, for instance, moved away from the fundamentalist religious views of the Puritans and brought more restrictive policy, such as the separation of church and state, to prevent religious influence on the state.

But, despite these contradictory narratives about the founding fathers, the belief that the citizens of this land were chosen by God remained and even deepened during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The motto “In God we trust” appeared on certain US coins in 1864; subsequently it was progressively included on all coins and, eventually, on paper currency in 1956, the year in which this statement became the official motto of the United States. This followed the amendment to the “Pledge of Allegiance” two years earlier, in which the phrase “under God” was added. This overt religious verbiage on US currency and in the “Pledge of Allegiance” contributed to boost in the popular imagination the idea of the United States as a providential country.

However, the religious influence on US politics, although always present, had periods of low intensity and less overt presence, such as in the 1960s and 1970s. But this connection has had a revival in recent years among political elites and the population at large, according to several studies (Avery and McLaughlin 2013; Foner 2004; Gross et al. 2011; King 2013; Martin 2005). These studies suggest that the religious influence is connected with a revival of conservative views since the 1970s, (perhaps in response to the free-thinking 1960s); during this time several conservative movements with strong religious inspirations started to work at different levels of civil society and within the political process, such as in school boards and judicial elections, and the attempt to elect their candidates at local and national elections. These efforts extended to foreign affairs, in which several religious organizations, including “Mormons from Utah and Pentecostals from Missouri go into the world, converting people to a faith marked by the material success of its adherents as much as by the appeal of their doctrines and ceremonies” (Kazin 2003).

The reality is that religious influence and effects are omnipresent in everyday life in the United States. For the large proportion of the US population, to be a citizen of the United States is to be religious. Belonging to a religion is part of the US national identity, and this implies also that most Americans see themselves as a special people chosen by God. In the United States the large majority of the population will assume that everyone is religious and that everyone attends church. Despite the legal protection for freedom of speech and religion, in the United States nonbelievers and atheists are made to feel like lesser Americans and often face discrimination, as a recent study documents (IHEU 2012). This study presents concrete cases of discrimination against nonbelievers in the US military and in prisons, and provides a list of seven states in which atheists cannot run for public offices (Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas); and in Arkansas, they cannot even testify at a trial. Another study (Edgell et al. 2006) reveals that atheists are the least trusted and most despised of all minority groups in the United States.

These predominant beliefs are clearly recognized by elected officials, including the president of the United States, who will necessarily attend church on Sundays, and who will seemingly never end a speech without intoning the ritual “God bless America.” In fact, political leaders often appeal to religious principles to support their views. The connection between religion and politics, at least symbolically, is also represented by the fact that in Congress as well as in most state legislatures and city and local council meetings, a chaplain (rotating, from different faiths) opens each session with a prayer.

Furthermore, religious groups claim a special role and position in US society, and they do not shy away from taking positions on public and political issues. Churches are free to intervene in politics, and they do so in their sermons and in their support for political candidates as well as in legal actions. These activities are based on the idea that, because there is a separation of church and state, certain laws do not apply to them. Indeed, in the United States, the separation of church and state has come to be understood in practice as protecting religion from the intervention of the state. A recent example of this interpretation was a mandate of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, which required employers to include contraception as part of the reimbursable items in their health insurance. Many religious groups, including religiously affiliated universities such as the University of Notre Dame and Catholic University of America,

considered this as an intrusion of the state into their religious beliefs and brought about lawsuits against the federal government (Radnofsky 2012).

This view of religion does affect foreign relations and foreign policies in many ways. We have already mentioned the idea of the United States as a “country chosen by God” and therefore the United States cannot do wrong. This belief is used to justify unilateral US foreign interventions and invasions of other countries around the world, as well as the nature of US aid to foreign countries. For instance, the US government restricts and places requirements on US aid for family-planning activities abroad (Blanchfield 2013). In fact, as Michael Kazin (2013) states, Americans “believe that Christianity should serve practical, worldly ends—whether banning abortion or giving a believer the confidence to make a fortune or pitch a winning playoff game. And that kind of instrumentalism has long been the true American creed.” This instrumentalism is equally applied to international affairs, as the example above suggests. In sum, as we have seen in the statements by interviewees, in the pervasive and widespread religious influences, in the declarations of presidents, and in the other practices described above, there is a close interaction of religion and politics in the United States, institutionally, and in every sphere of social life.

The overarching religious influence in US affairs can also be discerned in the concepts of “good” and “evil.” If in fact the United States is viewed as a chosen country by God, everything the United States does must be good, and those who disagree must be evil. This seems very simplistic and exaggerated and, of course, not every US citizen espouses that view, but it is nonetheless quite widespread, including among political leaders, as some of the quotes I presented in the previous chapter suggest. Therefore, in international affairs, evil could encompass certain states (“evil empire,” “rogue states,” and so on) or individuals, (such as Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Vladimir Putin, Saddam Hussein) and, therefore, acting against those states or individuals is bringing greater good to the world.

In France the religious concept of good and evil applied to political affairs does not exist, nor does the nation subscribe to upholding a missionary role within international affairs. Concrete historical processes have produced a very different thinking regarding religion, and French political leaders’ sense of exceptionality is more related to the strong secularization of French society and a sharp separation between politics



and religion. There is, of course, the Westphalia agreement of 1648, which proposed a different organization of the state and established some principle of separation from the religious order. In particular in France, the idea of the separation of church and state historically responded also to the need to stop the bloody religious wars, which divided the country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But even more importantly secularism was part of the new order created after the French Revolution of 1789, which originally subordinated the church to the state and then made a sharp separation between politics and the church, and was finally reaffirmed in a 1905 law decreeing a separation of church and state, and thereby establishing definitively the French secular state that is in place today. The state in France is the guarantor of freedom *of* religion, but also of freedom *from* religion. French national identity is very much established in terms of belonging to a civil community, as a citizen of a state, even though among political leaders interviewed there is recognition of the influence of religious traditions in French culture, as this statement from a PS–MP suggests:

We are certainly one of the most secular countries in the world, but the reality of our history cannot be wiped out completely. Religion, and particularly Christianity in France, as in most countries of Europe, has influenced certain values and views of the world.

But, above all, the separation of church and state in France involves protecting the state from religion and keeping the practice of religion as a private matter. This view implies that in France religious freedom can be restricted in order to protect the public order or to uphold the sharp separation of church and state in public buildings, for example, as the 2010 case of the veil-banning has demonstrated (in 2010 the National Assembly and the Senate of France passed a law prohibiting concealment of the face in public spaces, which included masks, *nicqàbs*, *burqas*, and other veils.) In the United States, any restriction on what is considered religious freedom would be inconceivable. This is an important issue in France for Muslim believers, since Islam does not recognize the separation of church and state.

The unity of France relies on a belief beyond religion. It is based on allegiance to the state, to the nation. It is expected that all French people are first, and above all, citizens, and then members of a group or a religion. This quote from a speech on secularism by president Jacques Chirac (2003), exemplifies this state of mind:

Secularism guarantees freedom of conscience. It protects the freedom to believe or not to believe. It ensures everyone has the opportunity to express and practice their faith peacefully, freely, without the threat of being imposed other beliefs. It allows women and men who came from other horizons, from all cultures, to be protected in their beliefs by the Republic and its institutions. ... Religious freedom that our country respects and protects cannot undermine the common rule. It cannot impose on the freedom of belief of others. It is this delicate balance, precious and fragile, built patiently for decades, which ensures compliance with the principle of secularism. And this principle is a chance for France. That is why it is written on the first article of our constitution. That is why it is not negotiable!

In short, secularization is predominant in everyday life in France, while religiosity predominates in the United States, even though there is growing secularization in the United States among the younger population (Godstein 2012; Torpey 2012).

The French secularist views applied to foreign affairs imply that the world and all the issues and conflicts can be approached by rational and coherent thinking and provide a view that connects secularism to modernity and progress. In fact, this French vision of secularism had strong appeal in Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Ataturk, and followed by the Turkish military until today, as well as among many Middle East leaders who wanted to modernize their countries in the twentieth century, such as Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Syria (Carré 2004; Guingamp 1970; Pinta 1995; Saint-Prot 2013). These leaders wanted to rely on science and social engineering to lead their country out of darkness and backwardness.

While the United States certainly does not discard rational thinking, its policies are also influenced by religious sensibilities. We have seen in previous pages the expressions of US political leaders' patterns of thought regarding the US role in the world, and how these ideas have been influenced by religious views of wrong and right. This does not imply that all US officials, including individuals who occupied the position of secretary of state, such as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeleine Albright, or Hillary Clinton, for example, considered themselves to be in this providential concept, but they had to work within a political environment that endorsed this view. Indeed, these interpretations of the United States as a providential country have been at the cornerstone of US foreign policy for most of the twentieth century, and in particular all presidents in the most recent period analyzed in this study, from Reagan



to Obama, have proclaimed in their speeches their belief in the historical mission of the United States to spread its values to the world: “America is a chosen nation, grounded in its families and neighborhoods and driven inevitably forward by its heroic working people toward a world of freedom and economic progress” (Reagan, cited in Lewis 1987). These views, coupled with the idea of “manifest destiny,” has historically allowed the United States to justify foreign interventions.

In sum, religion is a major force in US politics, and as the declarations of political leaders reflect, it influences the shaping of foreign policy and how political leaders respond to world events. This research confirms Walter Mead’s statement that “religion explains both Americans’ sense of themselves as a chosen people and their belief that they have a duty to spread their values throughout the world” (2006, 24).

## **Foreign policy on security and conflict**

France and the United States are often in agreement and collaborating on many fronts to combat terrorism and seek peace in several areas of the world, including Africa and the Middle East. As the following quote from a Democratic representative interviewed stresses:

Despite the confrontations we had with France over the Iraq War, I am most impressed by the similarities of our views, more than the differences. France has been a great ally of the US over a number of years. We basically see the world from the same perspective and I think the worldview is fundamentally the same. Now there are differences in specific politics.

Although there might be more agreement than disagreement between French and US political elites on what are the difficult situations in the world and what should be done, there are, however, considerable differences on how to approach the problem. Indeed, in the making of foreign policy, even though both countries rely more on the executive branch and the president in everyday actions, many actors play a role, such as the Parliament/Congress, of course, but also the media, corporations, and even international organizations, such the United Nations and others. Most interviewees would say that it is crucial in foreign policy to analyze all options carefully; however, in practice people cannot escape their perceptions and ideology. Indeed, the interviews show that most political elites in both countries are entrapped in the Western view of the

world, and their statements reflect a reproduction of these views in their dealings with issues in the Middle East and elsewhere. They cannot avoid the individualistic, electoral politics and capitalistic mindset that characterize the Western world. Both emphasize the importance of promoting Western ideas of democracy and human rights, but the US leaders tend to go further in judging other countries and promoting their views on how the countries of the world should organize their societies.

Indeed, US political leaders often classify foreign governments that they consider enemies, or that have a poor human rights record, as rogue states, or a group of states as an “axis of evil.” For these US leaders, any country that belongs to the “respectable” societies of the world or what they call the “free world” must be engaged in establishing a capitalist system. Furthermore, as we have seen, a widespread view among US political elites denotes that this country, because of its exceptional qualities and its idealism, is particularly destined to lead the world towards democracy and freedom, as reflected in the following quotes:

I do not want to sound too nationalistic, but to me given the state of the world today, I do not see any other country that can defend freedom and democracy better than the US. (D-Senator, senior advisor)

The most important aspect of the US compared with other countries is the tension between realism, simply put looking for their own interests, and idealism, to do good in the world independently from our own interests. I would think that other countries do not have that tension. (Think-tank expert)

Indeed, the French, at least judging by the interviews and presidents’ declarations, consider that their foreign policy should be based mostly on pragmatism, a pragmatism that is influenced by a mix of the desire to promote freedom and democracy in the world, but following a Durkheimian approach, as Bertand Badie (2010) suggests, emphasizing integration rather than power, or meaning instead of coercion. In this context the French conceive their actions in the world as working towards strengthening the international system and to help in the organization of the states in several parts of the world, for instance in the Middle East or Africa:

We have of course our preferences in dealing with conflict and other countries, but we cannot forget that other people are not like us. For instance, like most French people, many of us, who worked in foreign assignments, are dismayed and outraged by some actions toward women in other countries

in the name of a religion or any particular cultural rule, but that should not prevent us from dealing with the leaders of those countries who are ordering those acts. And our role is to try to present different alternatives of social organization. (UMP former foreign affairs minister)

There is certainly an idealist side among French political elites, but given their involvement with the Middle East and East Asia, their (mostly secular) attitude does not seem to interfere as much as in the case of the United States, which is much more influenced by a missionary duty and an expectation that people in the world pledge to the idea of capitalism and US-style democracy. France does not require of countries she deals with to subscribe to particular policies or values. Based on my interviews, the French seem to recognize more than most US interviewees the limits of attempting to apply their worldviews to other cultures:

We cannot claim to have the power to change or shape cultural structures that have evolved in a country for centuries in a few years. What we can do is to provide some ideas that could help the civil society or social actors in that country to develop a new organization of the society, but we cannot do it for them. (PS-MP)

Their relationship with a country is based on the fact that it represents a number of people in the world. and as long as they are not aggressive against France or other countries, are worthy of establishing relationships. Therefore, the French government tends to deal with everyone, avoiding openly classifying the countries in terms of enemies and friends, and there seems to be fewer contradictions in their actions than in the case of the United States, which on the one hand claims to be acting in the world in the name of freedom and democracy, while on the other hand often supports dictatorships.

Everyone interviewed agreed, in the abstract, to the idea that in order to promote peace and security in the world no country can do it alone. But in practice, several of the politicians interviewed in the United States, particularly those from the conservative Republican Party, expressed their willingness for the United States to lead and others to follow. For them there is no recognition of the equality of others or a sense of what other countries can contribute to finding appropriate solutions for the world.

A large proportion of Americans do not give credit to other countries or even to the United Nations in terms of solving the problems of the world. For instance, a recent Gallup poll (Jones and Wendt 2013) asked

the following question: “Do you think the United Nations is doing a good job or a poor job in trying to solve the problems it has had to face?” Fifty percent of US citizens responded that it was doing a poor job, and only 35 percent that it was doing a good job. In another poll (Pew 2012) expressing a general opinion on the United Nations, the response was not as negative, although there was more approval of the U.N. among French than among US respondents.

The American understanding of allies and enemies is very much related to concerns regarding adherence to US views. For instance, in domestic affairs, immigrants are expected to associate themselves with the United States through the Pledge of Allegiance, even though it is acceptable to retain some aspects of their culture. Therefore, when the US deals with foreign relations it is expected that the allied countries accept its views and act accordingly, as we have seen during the Iraq intervention. From the US point of view allies must follow US leadership. Because they think that their way is the best way, US leaders expect other countries in the world to agree with their concept of state and democracy. Historically, more often than not the United States has been able to impose its way, particularly with regard to most Western European countries. Even recently, responding to secret documents leaked by US whistleblower Edward Snowden, Europeans complained about the United States spying on them through programs of the National Security Agency. Subsequently, however, when it was suspected that Snowden was sharing a flight from Moscow to Bolivia with Bolivian President Evo Morales, in expectations of political asylum in that country, the governments of France, Italy, and Portugal all acceded to demands by the US government to not allow overflight through their air space.

Another difference in approaches to foreign policy between France and the United States refers to the issue of long-term versus short-term solutions. Even though key US foreign policies have remained the same from the 1950s to the present, concrete actions in response to international conflicts and issues are implemented by constantly adapting to new situations oriented towards short-term fixes, often disregarding historical processes and long-run consequences. As a former French foreign minister said:

My experience was that Americans are not so concerned about long-term consequences, perhaps because they think they can always find new ways of dealing with those problems. In general, from the US perspective if an action has some success in the short term one should consider it. The

difficulties on the long run are not really looked at as long as a short-term solution is found.

This approach could be exemplified by the different alliances that the US government has formed through the years, which then became problems that the United States had to solve through violent actions and at the cost of many lives. For instance, the United States armed Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban to fight the Soviet Union within Afghanistan in the 1980s and then years later the Taliban became a far worse enemy than the Soviets. The United States for many years supported Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, who was used to eliminating previous presidents of Iraq; Hussein was the friendly US ally against Iran, fighting the Iran–Iraq War of the 1980s, and finally he became the United States's main enemy in the early years of the century. In Latin America there have been many other similar cases. It should suffice to mention the example of Manuel Noriega in Panama, who was working very closely with the CIA and later became an enemy, as well as Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, whom the United States promoted after its first invasion of the Dominican Republic in the early twentieth century, only to end up allegedly helping in his assassination in 1961 (CIA 1973; BBC 2011).

Political leaders in France believe that it is fundamental to pay attention to structures and to processes in the long run. They tend to look more on medium- and long-term consequences and the risks involved, and therefore they work more slowly and are more hesitant to act than is the United States, although this was not always the case, according to two interviewees. For instance, “President Sarkozy deviated slightly from this traditional tendency and was more prompt to action in the short term” (PS–MP). And it seems that the present president of France is also deviating from this traditional policy, given his interventionist views in Syria.

These different historical approaches between France and the United States were epitomized in dealing with the United Nations inspection process of Iraq in 2002–03, in response to that country's supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction. The French wanted to allow more time for inspections to continue to be sure, because the risks were too many on the short and long term. The US government, under president George W. Bush, wanted a more rapid solution.

Given that most US political leaders act as if they possess the truth, they tend to accuse those countries that do not follow their judgment

as being self-interested. That was how several US government officials judged France and Germany during the Iraq crisis, and even earlier when there were disagreements in the relations with China and the Soviet Union. At the same time, US politicians do not shy away from deploying the “American interests” argument in debates concerning international relations, and the debates are on the extent of American interests, not whether such interests could be contrary to other major principles such as human rights. While France has also often used French interests to justify its actions abroad, the most recent interventions, such as in Libya and Mali, were justified in the name of human rights, international justice, and democracy, and cooperation with the government of the former colony. In fact, as we have seen through the various negotiations regarding the conflicts in the Middle East, the French have acted more within the context of cooperation, while the United States has shown that when negotiations did not produce what it expected it was willing to act alone if necessary. In the short term, the US approach might produce better solutions, but as we have seen in many cases, including the Iraq War and previous interventions, this does not necessarily hold true in the long term.

One of the key rationales often used to intervene in other countries by the United States government is to bring democracy—one of the major justifications for invading Iraq, and in this particular case to bring democracy to the Middle East (especially after the weapons of mass destruction argument was dismissed). The neoconservatives who advised Georges W. Bush on foreign policy argued that by bringing democracy to Iraq, other countries in the region would also feel the pressure for democratization. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was an expression of the willingness of these conservative politicians “to impose [by force] American ideas on how the world should be governed” (Hodgson 2013). Many critics, however, assert that this claim of fostering democracy is just a propaganda strategy: “Neoconservatism in foreign policy is best described as unilateral bellicosity cloaked in the utopian rhetoric of freedom and democracy” (Klein 2008).

It might be, as these critics suggest, that the neoconservatives are not really interested in exporting democracy and that they are mostly interested in preventing any type of challenge in the world, even among regional emerging powers, but the fact that the democratization argument works when it comes to convincing the American public, it reflects a certain

view of the world of the US population and even among politicians, as the interviews show. Mark Twain's statement during the war in the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century is still applicable to US foreign policy:

America is exceptional mainly in its citizens' ability to imagine that they and their nation were free from the age-old arrogance of power and lust for conquest. (Cited by Kazin 2013)

In their goals for influencing foreign governments, both French and Americans generally support the idea of creating some form of electoral system, which allows for political expression of the people, together with promoting basic human rights. However, this concept, itself, is very different in the United States than in France. The idea of popular sovereignty is very much part of the French definition of and support for democracy. That is, the voice of the people, and the French electoral system more or less reflects this approach. In the case of the United States, the founding fathers never gave absolute power to the people. In the US Constitution, contrary to the French constitution, the principle of popular sovereignty is not stated. The founding fathers created an electoral system that prevented the majority of the people from ruling the country without checks. The Electoral College is one of those mechanisms, as is the system of jurisprudence, such as the Supreme Court, which can overturn laws passed by Congress. In fact, in the United States the interpretation of the constitution by the Supreme Court takes precedence over the democratic process, even though in practice the vast majority of laws have never been considered by the Supreme Court. In addition, the fact that the United States does not maintain a proportional system (or a two-round elections, as in France) but rather one in which the winner (majority of voters plus one) takes all, generally prevents third parties from obtaining representation in Congress. Furthermore, many right-wing conservatives refer to "super-political sovereignty, to a God who stands above the nation and whose objective represents the yardstick by which the nation is justified" (Bellah 2013). This also shows different approaches to dealing with the creation of democracy in foreign countries. For the French, the process of democratization is not something that will likely happen in a short time frame. They have experienced a democratization process that lasted at least three centuries in their own country, if we consider as a starting point the writings associated with the Enlightenment. Furthermore, when talking about bringing democracy to the world, these two countries are confronted with contrasting concepts, not only



in terms of defining democracy, but also in terms of the possibility of creating democracy by invading countries or pushing a given dictator out of power. This relates also to differences in the role that the military should play in foreign affairs. In the United States, there is an ideological framework that allows political leaders to convince a large proportion of the population to support the war effort, with the backing of the media (such as Fox News for example); indeed, since World War II the United States usually enjoys a strong support at the beginning, because people believe that it is for a good cause, but with time and after many US lives lost, the war typically loses support. As a French member of Parliament from the UMP states, “In France it would be impossible to convince a majority of French people to accept the intervention in Iraq, for example, as the US did.”

In short, even if the French political elite wanted to pursue a foreign military engagement, the people would not support it, as the interviewees suggested, and as several polls through the years have shown; and even a possible limited strike on Syria does not draw support among the population. According to a recent poll 59 percent of the French oppose French military engagement in the conflict, even with the support of the U.N. (*Le Figaro* 2013). It was acceptable to intervene in short and limited operations such as in Libya and, recently, in Mali, but even in these operations, many voices expressed discomfort (Drouineau 2013).

It is important to point out that this latest call of the Obama administration to intervene militarily in the Syrian civil war, is also being rejected by a majority of the US population, as CNN (Steinhauser and Helton 2013) and Gallup (2013) polls show. This is the first time that there is such a stiff opposition; however, it remains to be seen if this opposition will hold if the US government decides to go ahead anyway. Indeed, in the past, once military strikes started, there was a resurgence and/or increase of public support (as in the Kosovo bombing campaign and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars).

In France, in addition to the lack of public support, the country obviously does not have the military means that the United States has at its disposal, as a UMP former French foreign minister explains:

We have to recognize that we do not have the means to intervene in large operations. Even though we have a modern air force with supersonic fighters and supersonic bombers capable of delivering nuclear weapons, and nuclear ballistic missiles of all types, as well as a navy with missile-launching submarines, this is not enough to sustain certain operations.



This issue of limited military means is not only French. I think that it is widespread in Europe. In fact, no single European country could have the means to intervene in large operations; that is why we need a more united Europe. In any case, at the present, we are forced to abandon the military role in the world to the US.

The fact that there is not support in the population and even among French political leaders to increase resources for the military reflects also a view of the world, which emphasizes diplomacy and negotiation. French political leaders in most cases rely on diplomacy to promote the republican values of freedom, democracy, and equality to the world. They approach this process more as the need to foster change in the structures of states. Accordingly the French would attempt to create some legal framework with other countries or international organizations in order to produce the change in a region or a particular country. In contrast US political leaders tend to identify issues and want to act to produce change as quickly as possible, including establishing short-term agreements if necessary. In general, the French legal tradition is based more on establishing treaties for the long term and which serve as a framework upon which the signatory countries can rely.

This discrepancy between France and the United States derives from their respective approaches to creating laws and enforcing them. In France, following political parties' legislative deliberation and vote to approve proposed legislation, it becomes law, and only the National Assembly can revisit it; in the United States, on the other hand, legislative issues might be argued in the courts even after they have been voted on and approved by Congress and, therefore, laws can be changed from one case to the other. The lawsuits initiated by conservative constituencies challenging the Affordable Care Act are examples of this process. In most respects, the French rely on the state apparatus to reinforce the laws, while in the United States it is both the state apparatus and, to a large extent, the courts.

This different approach is very much expressed also when dealing with international law and international organizations, such as the U.N. For the French, international laws constitute important mechanisms for achieving peace in the world. In the United States, at least in recent times, international laws are seen more as political statements or political instruments. For instance, although in principle political leaders support certain agreements, in practice they tend to reject them when these laws limit the action of United States in the world or can be applied to them.

The most salient recent examples are the constitution of the International Court of Justice, the Kyoto Protocol, Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Mine Ban Treaty, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, all of which the United States has not ratified. In truth, many in the United States wanted to ratify these international treaties, but a majority in Congress were opposed on the basis of national sovereignty. By this reasoning, they did not want US citizens to be subject to foreign rules, including the International Court of Justice, which many politicians support in principle. This is reminiscent of the Connally amendment of September 24, 1960, to the US ratification of the United Nations Charter to prevent the International Court of Justice from having jurisdiction over US domestic matters, as determined by the United States. The claim is that the actions of the International Court could result in unfair prosecution or might be perceived as infringing upon US laws:

Well, I can say that most people in Congress applauded the actions of the International Court of Justice regarding, for example, bringing to justice the perpetrators of the genocide in the former Yugoslavia, but very few people in Congress would support the US to be part of that treaty and be submitted to the rules of the International Court of Justice. (R-Rep.)

Given the powerful position that the United States occupies in the world as well as its political leaders' views that the United States pursues the right course anyway, these leaders and a large part of the population did not find it necessary for the United States to be bound by any international law. For French political leaders, it is almost a natural process to be bound by international agreements. The experience as part of the European Union makes the idea of relinquishing some sovereignty acceptable or even desirable in order to reach objectives of progress and peace, which was the original objective behind the European Union's founding (originally the Coal and Steel Agreement). Therefore, for French political leaders, strengthening international peace and creating a better world implies convincing the international community of their ideas about the good society, but within the framework of international agreements. This is reflected in how the two countries handle specific issues; for example, human rights violations. US political leaders see these violations in terms of their own constitution, in particular the Bill of Rights, while French leaders, even though they are certainly inspired

by their own concepts, will work within the framework of the international community, applying the common international concept of human rights to each case at hand. French political leaders see the establishment of a legal framework as fundamental to advancing human rights, even though they recognize that such a framework is inspired by political ideologies while, for US political leaders, the agreement itself is a political statement and therefore it is more a question of political ideology. Again, here is an issue of the missionary-like motivation of US foreign policy in attempting to bring to the world what US political leaders consider the best they can offer. This includes the idea that the US Constitution, or its interpretation, is better than any international agreement in terms of protecting human rights and freedoms within the United States and in the world at large. This is what most of the interviewees considered as what US exceptionalism can bring to the world. This belief is widespread, despite the fact that even the powerful United States has to enter into some negotiations in order to solve problems and world issues. As Roger Cohen writes, “How exceptional can you be when every major problem you face, from terrorism to nuclear proliferation to gas prices, requires joint action?” In fact, as Godfrey Hodgson (2013) suggests, this exceptionalism is just a form of nationalism, and “a nationalism that makes claims for America’s duty, America’s destiny, and America’s place in world history.” This nationalism, projected internationally, can be dangerous for the world, but also for the United States, even though there is no awareness among the majority of the political leadership of the risks involved in trying to impose US values upon other countries. Indeed, the idea that the United States can do no harm is so ingrained in the popular imagination that the multiple interventions pursued by the United States are seen as necessary to bring peace and security to the world, and to the United States in particular. When the average US citizen sees televised anti-American demonstrations in the streets of many countries of the world, including burning the US flag, or worse, attacks on US embassies, terrorist bombings, shooting innocent people on US territory, or committing horrific acts of terror such as 9/11, they ask themselves: “Why do they hate us?” Too often, the answer provided by the media and political leaders is because, as George W. Bush said in his September 20, 2001 (joint address to Congress), “They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble.” Of course, not everyone thinks this way. There are voices in the United States, among political elites and among the

population, that question US foreign policy and invasions of foreign countries as the cause of some of these negative responses from abroad; the fact is that the United States has been at war almost constantly since it became a country (the United States has had 120 military interventions on foreign soil since 1890, according to Zoltán Grossman 2013). But these voices are in the minority, and in situations of conflict they tend to be characterized as unpatriotic. A considerable proportion of interviewees displayed a certain inability to analyze the world from a global perspective and showed a lack of understanding of present international issues, relying more on a general rhetoric, often impregnated with nationalistic and religious values, rather than on a rational analysis of facts. To paraphrase Woodrow Wilson, Americans are citizens of the world. The tragedy of our times is that many political leaders in Congress ignore this fact or choose to ignore it. As Gary Reichard and Ted Dickson (2008, back cover) argue, “the development of the United States has always depended on its transactions with other nations for commodities, cultural values and populations.”

We have seen reflected in the interviews of US political leaders a view of the world that is basically US-made. This view is reminiscent of the ideas expressed by the conservative scholar, Robert Kagan (2013), and the national security advisor to Democratic President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Even though Brzezinski is subtler and a little more humble, both of these individuals claim that the most important features of the world at present, such as peace among the great powers, democracy, and prosperity, were produced directly or indirectly by the actions of the United States. While one cannot deny the weight and the fundamental role in the world that the United States has played, and still plays, political leaders and many scholars should consider Godfrey Hodgson’s (2013) advice:

It is not healthy to congratulate oneself or to exaggerate how much one exceeds others. It is not wise to imagine that one is called upon, by God or history or by some other higher power, to rule others by superior force. It is wise to resist the temptation to dominate merely because one has the power to do so.

Perhaps a fundamental weakness of US foreign policy is the idea that the United States can lead the world in implementing democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, without really recognizing the world’s cultural pluralism and diversity, and without recognizing that economic

interdependence does not necessarily imply the application of all the economic recipes suggested by the neoliberals.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the differences in US and French approaches to foreign policy are due certainly to the different positions that they occupy in the world and to what are perceived as different interests (as realist theories of international relations suggest), but also to the political cultures that inform those perceived interests and the decision-making of the political leaders. Indeed, this comparison of political elites' belief systems demonstrates that interests, institutional arrangements, and current events are influenced by deeper beliefs and conceptualizations, and that policy outcomes and directives are based on these conceptualizations.

Most of the US interviewees argued that US foreign policy is mostly based on idealism, and some would agree that: "American foreign policy is really continually in a kind of conflict between idealism and realism, and I think it is marked by both" (D-Rep.). As we have seen, the rhetoric of political leaders is very much based on the idea of the United States projecting its vision to the world. But the key issue relates to how the ideas of democracy, and freedom are promoted. For years, in the context of the cold war, the United States supported many dictatorships around the world, and even today a few authoritarian regimes. The numerous invasions in Latin America and elsewhere, including the instigation or direct participation in the assassination of leaders who were perceived as dangerous for US interests, proves that the United States did not hesitate to use any necessary means to impose its views and defend what was perceived as its interests.

The key difficulty that the United States has to face in the twenty-first century is to manage the transition from its unrestricted monopoly on world power to the existence of many powers in the world. The United States surely will still play a major role in the world for years to come: "It remains the predominant military power with the greatest ability to project power abroad" (Torpey 2013, 19). France, in particular, and most likely other Europeans allies, seem to be relatively happy to leave the military leadership to the United States. However, US power will be projected within a different context and will need to adapt to the

emerging powers and accommodate the interests of the allied countries of Europe, as well as to the interests of China, Russia, India, Brazil, and others. The lesson of the last 20 years has been that the US political elites came out of the cold war thinking that US power was unlimited; indeed many politicians even thought that the only obstacle they had in the world were the few “liberals” within their own country who opposed US interventions.

The differences presented are attempts to explain the mindsets that underly French and American foreign policy and the differences and similarities between two universalisms. Of course, this study does not address everything possible, and it is not comprehensive. We need to approach these differences with the view that there are different cultural and thought patterns on both sides about possible actions to find solutions and to address problems in the world. There is certainly no definitive answer, but looking at the problems from multiple angles and multiple perspectives, and with the idea that there is no single overarching truth, will allow French and US political leaders to better address the complexities of this uncertain and multipolar world.

Political leaders should question the role that the West has been playing in the international scene, as former French President, Jacques Chirac (2001), suggested:

Have we remained faithful to our own cultures and their underlying values? Has the West given the impression of imposing a dominant culture essentially materialistic, perceived as aggressive, as most of the humanity can only observe, notice it, but without having access to it? To what extent should a civilization export its values?

When political leaders talk about exporting democracy, about defending human rights in other countries, including defending freedom, and then attempt to impose a given system on other countries by coercion, using economic pressure, and sometimes violence, ignoring the social realities and complexities of these societies, the West appears in the eyes of the inhabitants of those countries as ethnocentric, and as aggressors.

The fact is that the world we have known during the second half of twentieth century, in which the United States became the dominant superpower, is fading away. That world had perhaps more rigid and established points of reference than does this new world of the twenty-first century, which is more complex and multipolar, with many more

diverse cultural flows going in many directions. As a UMP senator stated:

If political leaders fail to recognize the extent of these recent changes, if they do not have enough determination to comprehend all the consequences, including understanding their own limitations, they will be condemned to respond to the events instead of contributing to shaping them.